

VZCZCXRO5427  
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH RUEHTRO  
DE RUEHGO #0319/01 1261340  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 051340Z MAY 08  
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7484  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1119  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4666  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8207  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5769  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3637  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1521  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000319

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR USAID/OFDA, EAP/MLS, S/ES-O-CMS, DS/CC AND  
DS/IP/EAP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: CYCLONE NARGIS SITREP NO. 1

REF: A. RANGOON 310

[B](#). RANGOON 315

[C](#). RANGOON 317

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. All Embassy facilities suffered some damage from Cyclone Nargis on May 3, five residences are currently without water, and one residence has been rendered uninhabitable. Post is working to secure fuel and food supplies for facilities and personnel, and has requested authorized departure for family members. We have received no reports of major injuries or deaths among American citizens in Rangoon. The GOB has acknowledged the deaths of 10,000 people throughout the country, but downplays the extent of damage to Rangoon. Reports from local citizens, however, indicate otherwise fuel and water shortages, adding to hardships, price gouging, and people angry at the lack of preparedness and response by the GOB. End Summary.

#### Embassy Operations

-----

[1](#)2. (SBU) Embassy Rangoon continues to assess damage to facilities, as well as the immediate needs of the Embassy community. At a Town Hall for American staff, the management section outlined its initial priorities: assessment and clean-up of damage to Embassy facilities, distribution of fuel to Embassy homes and buildings, assessment of food and water supplies. We also discussed seeking authorized departure of family members, and monitoring the welfare of other American citizens in the country.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Currently, there are at least five Embassy homes without adequate water, including the Chief of Mission and DCM residences. The storm blew the roof off of one residence, rendering it uninhabitable. Management and GSO continue to work to clear fallen trees and debris from facilities.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Management reported Post had not received all of the fuel supplies it had ordered. We currently have 3,200 gallons of high octane fuel and 6,600 gallons of diesel. Embassy took delivery of five truckloads of diesel on May 5, but was informed later that only two truckloads of the five we expected May 6 would be delivered. GSO is refueling residential generators subject to supplies and access, and is following up with Petronas to determine the status of future

fuel shipments. The current promised shipments should sustain the mission for up to one month, operating continuously on generators.

15. (SBU) RSO and DAO expressed concern about the ability of government authorities to maintain law and order, if citywide shortages of fuel, water, and food prove prolonged, and DAO reported isolated incidences of looting in Rangoon.

16. (SBU) Post has requested M approve the Authorized Departure of family members from Rangoon until the situation stabilizes and fuel, water, and food supplies return to normal. Seats on departing flights remain scarce, but GSO contacts report that Thai Airways will try to add a flight to its schedule to take additional people out of Burma.

17. (SBU) Over the weekend, Embassy officers canvassed the city to locate American citizens living in Rangoon. Our search revealed that while many suffer the electricity, communication, and fuel shortages caused by the storm, none reported injuries or deaths nor requested emergency assistance. The Embassy will hold a Town Hall meeting for official and non-official Americans on May 6. Conoff drafted a Travel Alert for Consular Affairs approval.

Situation on the Ground in Rangoon  
-----

18. (SBU) In a meeting with diplomats on May 5, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Information, and the Ministry of Social Welfare reported the death of 10,000

RANGOON 00000319 002 OF 002

people as a result of the cyclone's passage through Burma. They also stated 3,000 people were still missing. They reported major destruction in the Irrawaddy Delta, including the collapse of 95 percent of buildings. However, the Minister of Social Welfare asserted Rangoon was "not severely hurt; not very big damage." He claimed that one third of the city already had restored electricity and water supplies.

19. (SBU) The situation that Embassy personnel witnessed on the streets differed considerably from the Ministers. Many residents complained that the effects of the storm were exacerbated by the GOB's failure to warn of the coming cyclone and instruct citizens on how to prepare for it adequately. The vast majority of people were unprepared for such a disaster. Locals did not fail to point out to Embassy personnel that the soldiers who seemed so enthusiastic in the crackdown in September hesitated to help with meaningful clean-up and relief activities.

110. Trees and power lines are down throughout the city with most Burmese expecting repairs will take months. During a Town Hall meeting with the Embassy FSNs, they complained that their government had offered no information or assistance. One FSN noted that local officials visited him three times to solicit his vote of approval of the regime's constitution, but now was nowhere to be found. Most FSNs reported losing their roofs and increasing problems getting enough water. Since they are getting no news from government officials, they asked for more information from the shortwave broadcasters (VOA, RFA, DVB, BBC) about what to do during disasters, warning of fire hazards as candle use rises, how to make water safe, and other health advice.

111. (SBU) As a result of the cyclone, prices of fuel - gasoline and diesel - and basic food commodities have increased dramatically, putting the financial squeeze on many Burmese. Black market prices of gasoline increased 54 percent, from 5,200 kyat (\$4.70) a gallon to 8,000 kyat (\$7.20) a gallon, while diesel prices rose 72 percent from 5,800 kyat (\$5.20) a gallon to 10,000 kyat (\$9.00) a gallon. Food and water prices have also increased dramatically, due to lower supply, increased demand, and higher transportation costs. The most in-demand products are drinking water,

cooking oil, and rice. Potable water prices rose 233 percent, from 300 kyat (\$0.27) to 1000 kyat (\$90) a liter; cooking oil prices rose 45 percent, from 4,500 kyat (\$4.00) to 6,500 kyat (\$5.90) for a two liter bottle; and rice prices increased 25 percent, from 24,000 kyat (\$21.80) to 30,000 kyat (\$27.27) a bag. Vendors predict that prices will decrease over the next few days, as the government restores supply lines and the Regional Commander steps in to control prices. However, as long as fuel prices remain high, prices of water and basic food commodities will be higher than pre-cyclone levels (to be reported septel).

¶12. (SBU) As initial reports of looting and arguments over fuel and food start to trickle in, fears have risen that the security situation throughout the city could deteriorate over time. People are desperate to feed their families, repair roofs on their houses, and perform basic hygiene. The competition for scarce commodities has not only already driven up prices, but may also spark violence among citizens and between citizens and security forces.

VILLAROSA